

**A Sample Student Argumentative Research
Paper for English 1302**

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Intimate Invasions: A Closer Look at Sexual Violence

(1) In "Character," Ralph Waldo Emerson declares, "All violence. . . is not power but the absence of power" (Frank 906). Sexual violence is no exception. Rape and other forms of sexual assault are not merely "crimes of passion," nor are they outcomes of an overactive sex drive. Many theories exist as to why men rape, but it is clear that these crimes are displays of aggressive power, rage, and dominance acted out in sexual ways (Williams and Roleff 14).¹ Many people, from psychologists and other professionals to the rapists themselves, have attempted to exonerate sexual violence through a variety of excuses, such as claiming that women provoke men to violence. The feminist movement has brought the issue of rape to the forefront, but many people still cling to the deeply embedded cultural view of women as objects, and act accordingly. **Despite prevalent social and personal attitudes, however, sexual violence is never justified.**

(2a) Sexual violence is a broad term for a collection of physically and emotionally destructive crimes, including child sexual abuse, incest, sexual assault, and rape. For the purpose of this essay, however, I will use the term to indicate attempted or completed rape or other forms of sexual assault, whether

perpetrated by a stranger, acquaintance, relative, or spouse. Such abuse disregards all racial, ethnic, social, and economic borders, affecting men, women, and children of all ages, from infants to the elderly (Baleta; Scully 27; Rush 6). Data from the U.S. Department of Justice testifies that 500,000 rapes or sexual assaults occur each year (Williams and Roleff 12), which translates into approximately one per minute. Statistics indicate that 25 to 50 percent of women in the United States will be raped in their lifetimes (Chasteen 107).

The effects of sexual violence are often severe and can endure for months or even years. One researcher reports that “rape is a life-altering experience that leaves an emotional residue that may never completely disappear. . . . rape victims experience adverse psychological consequences, in some cases extreme, prompting some to move, change jobs, or drop out of school” (Scully 107).² Rape survivors (currently the preferred term, rather than “victims,” which carries negative connotations) have described their experiences in many ways. Nancy Venable Raine, in her book After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back, writes that she was “a language without punctuation,” “fully conscious, but [having] no emotions at all,” “adrift in a sea of silence,” and that “[the experience] changed [her] cell by cell” (Raine 24, 13, 161, 27). “Words no longer referred to anything, even themselves,” she remembers (15). Another woman put it this way:

It is a difficult thing to describe rape from the viewpoint of actually experiencing it. Everything happens all at once, and yet, at the same time, time stops altogether. Seconds become hours, and what in reality took only a few minutes seemed like time had no

control over it. There was a beginning, but that seemed like hours ago. There was not the energy to think of anything but the present. An end seemed nowhere in sight. (Reed)

Clearly, sexual violence is not a small problem affecting only an obscure portion of society. The vast number of victims alone would be enough to necessitate immediate social reformation, but the gravity of the situation does not end there. Sexual assaults not only destroy many lives, but also many victims never press charges against their attackers. Most research, including a 1972 Federal Bureau of Investigation study, indicates that only between 25 and 50 percent of rapes (completed and attempted) are ever brought to the attention of the police (Scully 5-6). Another government study suggests that for every reported rape, 3 to 10 other rapes go unreported (Koss 35). Some go as far as saying that “rape is the single most under-reported crime” (Estrich 184). Even when charges are filed, the conviction rate for sexual assault is, in most states, unusually low.³ According to a 1993 Senate Judiciary Report, 98% of rapists are never caught, and the 2% that are caught, if convicted, “can expect to serve an average of a year or less behind bars” (Raine 51).

(2b) At first glance, the problems relating to sexual assault, as in instances of other violations such as theft or murder, might appear to be obvious. In many, if not most crimes, there are guilty perpetrators and innocent victims. In reality, however, several differing viewpoints and controversies exist. Hot debates rage between psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and others over whether most instances of rape are actually consensual, whether women deserve to be raped,

whether men deserve to rape, and whether sexual violence is permissible under any circumstances.

The argument over whether rape even exists as a major problem in our society has a long history. Up until the so-called “Rape Movement” of the 1970’s, which was ushered in with the inception of the feminist movement, the generally accepted view perceived rape solely as a crime perpetrated by a stranger resulting in conspicuous physical injuries to the victim. Hence, unconsensual intercourse perpetrated by acquaintances, friends, or the spouse of the victim was not rape, at least from a social perspective. The idea that a woman could be raped by someone she knew was dismissed as merely an excuse for sexual promiscuity. Even as late as 1975, the legal definition of rape specifically excluded the husband of the victim as a potential rapist (Russell 13). According to this theory, practically all instances of so-called “rape” are nothing more than situations in which a woman intimates to a man, through conscious or unconscious actions, that she is available (and in doing so, gives her “consent”).

Another widespread controversy argues whether women, in some cases, deserve to be violated. The victim’s reputation (especially her sexual history) is taken into account, and, if questionable, is often used as evidence against her (Russell 304). What the victim was wearing at the time of the assault, whether she had been drinking, and even if she was walking alone at night are all frequently suggested in an attempt to prove that she was setting herself up to be assaulted. These have historically held up as permissible evidence in a court of law.^{4, 5}

A third theory on the topic of sexual violence, in some ways related to the previous theory, is that men have the right to treat women as possessions rather than people. Thus, rape is not really a problem because women are reduced to the sum total of their body parts, without feelings or inherent rights. This mindset, as well, is reminiscent of the pre-feminism days, before the concept of sexual equality gained popularity. While not politically correct or openly popular any longer, more people subscribe to this ideology than one might assume.

The fourth attitude that this essay will explore is that of rape never being permissible under any circumstances. Those who have embraced this conviction see sexual assault as the perpetrator's problem (Scully 45-47). All guilt rests on the rapist, regardless of the victim's actions or lack thereof. This is a relatively new theory, at least in the public arena, pioneered by researchers and women's rights activists within the past three decades.

(2c) Rape is a devastating personal violation, and, as such, it can never be excused. Socially, ethically, psychologically, and relationally, there can be no justification for sexual violence.

(2d) Rape is never consensual. In his Psychology of Misconduct, Vice, and Crime, Psychologist B. Hollander summed up his position in the argument with his claim that "considering the amount of illicit intercourse, rape of women is very rare, indeed. Flirtation and provocative conduct, i.e., tacit (if not actual) consent, is generally the prelude to intercourse" (Scully 102). The idea of implied consent can be interpreted in a number of ways. To most women, even "flirtatious, provocative" women, verbal and physical attempts at resisting sexual advances

clearly mean, “I don’t want to do this.” To a man—especially one given to violent behavior—such actions might be understood as, “I’m playing hard to get; keep trying.” Regardless of how these signals are interpreted, when a woman indicates that she does not desire to proceed, it is her partner’s social and ethical responsibility to respect her wishes, just as it would be the woman’s obligation to stop if the tables were turned.

Women can be raped by acquaintances, even boyfriends and spouses. The notion that the only “real” rapes were those cases in which a woman was jumped by a stranger hiding in the bushes is a cultural denial of what we are too scared to believe. We train our little boys to be tough and to fight for what they want, but we teach our little girls to be quiet, sensitive, and “ladylike;” then, when our children turn out as we have raised them, we wonder what went wrong.

Men never deserve to rape. The idea supporting this theory is that women belong to men, and, as possessions rather than equals, have few inherent rights. As Napoleon so eloquently stated, “Equality for women? That is madness. Women are our property; we are not theirs. They give us children. . . and belong to us as the fruit-bearing tree belongs to the gardener” (Frank 782). This attitude endures today, albeit wordlessly, in the fabric of American society, and, while not an outright license to rape, such a mindset explains why some men would not see rape as a personal offense against women. As researchers Diana Scully and Joseph Marolla point out in their article “Riding the Bull at Gilley’s”:

The attitude that sex is a male entitlement suggests that when a woman says “no,” rape is a suitable method of conquering the “offending” object. If, for example, a woman is picked up at a party or in a bar or while hitchhiking (behavior which a number of the rapists saw as a signal of sexual availability), and the woman later resisted sexual advances, rape is presumed to be justified. . . . The belief that sex was their just compensation compelled a number of rapists to insist they had not raped. (Scully and Marolla 66)

A view of sex as something men deserve to get—using force, if necessary—dehumanizes women. This perceived justification did not simply appear out of thin air. Our culture has taught for generations that “The man should be both strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive; the one must have both the power and the will; it is enough that the other should offer little resistance” (Frank 782). In a recent study of convicted rapists, Scully and Marolla have seen this principle, which Rousseau presented over two centuries ago, played out in the lives of young felons. The researchers observed that rape was a tool used to “put women in their place” and a means of establishing their “manhood” by flaunting their power over a woman (Scully and Marolla 64). One of their interviewees put it this way: “Rape is a man’s right. If a woman doesn’t want to give it, a man should take it. Women have no right to say no. Women are made to have sex. It’s all they are good for” (Scully 166). Such a view of women not only degrades women as a part of the human race, but also humanity as a whole.

The entire foundation of our current existence has been based upon the concept of men and women relating to each other in ways that appreciate the inherent value of the entire race. If half of that equation is “good for” nothing more than fulfilling the physical desires of the other fifty percent, then what is the purpose for which the male half was designed? If women were “made to have sex,” were men not also created for the same reason? **Reducing all of humanity to mere biology altogether devalues the entire human race.**

Just as men never have the right to rape, so also do women never deserve to be raped. In his book The Psychology of Crime, supporting the argument that rape is merited, psychologist David Abrahamsen offered his opinion:

The conscious or unconscious biological and psychological attraction between man and woman does not exist only on the part of the offender toward the woman, but, also, on her part toward him, which in many instances may, to some extent, be the impetus for his sexual attack. Often a women [sic] unconsciously wishes to be taken by force. (Scully 102)

Now the debate has shifted from suggesting that most rapes are consensual to stating that a woman frequently *wants* to be overpowered, and furthermore, that her unconscious attractions toward her attacker might even be the cause of the attack! Not only are the rape victim’s attempts at evading the situation misconstrued as desire on her part, but the blame for her assault is placed on her shoulders, as well.

Women neither desire nor deserve to be attacked, violated, or humiliated; they do not, through conscious or unconscious actions, invite a man to invade them by force and steal their honor and dignity. Rape survivor Nancy Venable Raine, quoted previously, is passionate about this reality. She states, “The idea that women derive some kind of erotic pleasure from ‘forced sex’ has drifted down from the stratosphere of psychoanalytic theory into our attitudes toward rape like rain that carries imperceptible toxins down into our drinking water” (Raine 135).

Primitive views of sexual assault encourage sexual predators to continue offending. Unfortunately, there are public servants—both in law enforcement and in the court system—who by their attitudes towards and comments about rape endorse the survival of this mindset. In a 1996 television interview, a San Diego police detective stated that some of the officers in the department viewed rape as “assault with a friendly weapon” (Raine 135). Wisconsin judge Archie Simonson remarked, “Given the way women dress, rape is a normal reaction” (Griffin 87). Another judge said that a five-year-old victim of sexual assault was “an unusually sexually promiscuous young lady” (Searles and Berger 179). A third commented, “When a woman drinks with a man to the point of intoxication, she practically invites him to take advantage of her person. She should not be permitted to yell when she is sober, ‘I was raped’” (Scully 124). Permitting those holding the most influential positions in our justice system to promote such a grave injustice is nothing short of unadulterated hypocrisy.

How did this society sink to such a low that anyone could assume that women want to be violated? No other crime suggests that its victims somehow deserved what they got. We do not discredit people who have been robbed by saying that they were asking for it. No one in his or her right mind would imply that a murder victim “had fun.” How then can Clayton Williams, a 1990 candidate for Texas governor, get away with saying about rape, “It’s like the weather. If it’s inevitable, just relax and enjoy it” (Frank 701)? **Women cannot and do not “relax and enjoy” being assaulted any more than murder victims could relax and enjoy the experience of being brutalized.**

Women live every day with the reality that their femininity makes them prey to the culturally sanctioned behaviors of their male counterparts. While rape shatters the life of its victims, for women, it is not an altogether unexpected occurrence. As a male rape survivor, Fred Pelka caught a glimpse into this truth that most men will never understand. Attacked by another heterosexual male, Pelka identifies rape as what it is: a show of power. After the assault, he was ridiculed by the police, his friends, and society around him precisely because, as he puts it, he had “been reduced to the status of *women*.” Men are supposed to be tough, masculine, and in control. He speculated that he would have gotten more respect—from men, at least—if he had been the rapist instead of the victim. “Rape for men is usually a bizarre, outrageous tear in the fabric of reality,” he states. “For women, rape is often a confirmation of relative powerlessness of men’s contempt for women, and its trauma is reinforced every day in thousands of obvious and subtle ways” (Pelka 255). Researcher Diana

Scully reiterated this idea when she asserted, “. . . even women who have not been victimized know that because they are women, they are rapable” (Scully 107).⁶

Women are rapable, and they are raped. As tragic as those assaults are, often equally as tragic is the secondary abuse victims receive after the fact from people who truly do care about them but just do not understand. So many in our culture do not see that rape is no more consensual than it is enjoyable. So many do not realize that men have no right to rape, and that women never deserve the violation that far too many suffer. So many just don't care.

September 21, 1837, as Ralph Waldo Emerson was contemplating alternatives to violence, he penned an idealistic but not untrue entry in his personal journal. He writes, “If a nation of men is exalted to that height of morals as to refuse to fight and choose rather to suffer loss of goods and loss of life than to use violence, they must not be helpless but most effective and great men; they would overawe their invader, and make him ridiculous; . . .” (Frank 553). In this fight against violence, it is vital to remember that violence cannot be conquered by force. Rape is a cultural and a societal problem, but it ultimately boils down to individual choices. People must learn to take responsibility for their own actions, and not find some faulty system upon which to blame their failures. Only when this society stops justifying violence will individuals be able to move beyond it. Until then, a solution to the problem of sexual violence will continue to remain just beyond our grasp.

Notes

¹ Nancy Venable Raine composed a syllogism about the connection between sex and sexual violence:

Rape is violence.

Sex is not violence.

Therefore, rape is not sex (Raine 202).

² Clearly, violence effects certain things in the violent as well as the violated. Franz Fanon asserted that “. . . violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (Frank 906). When our culturally conditioned men feel insufficient to meet their social expectations, they must find some way to reestablish their sense of machismo. Robert Allen and Paul Kivel claim to speak for men in general when they admit that abusing women alleviates worry of not being “tough enough” and confirms both their masculinity and heterosexuality (Williams and Roleff 47).

³ In her book, Understanding Sexual Violence, Diana Scully quotes a 1978 Law Enforcement Assistance Administration study, which dramatically illustrates the severity of the low rate of conviction in sexual assault cases. “For example,” it stated, “in 1978, of the 635 rape complaints that were reported to the police in Seattle and Kansas City, criminal cases were prepared on only 167 suspects. Of this number, only 45 cases brought rape or attempted rape charges by

prosecutors, 32 cases went to trial, and only 10 defendants—less than 2 percent—were convicted of rape or attempted rape” (Scully 6).

⁴ For more information on court procedure, see Scully 124; Russell 303-304.

⁵ Since there are many ways of attempting to rationalize sexual violence, author Freda Adler is not surprised that so few women report their attacks. What else can be expected, she inquires in her book Sisters In Crime, from an offense that accuses the victim and requires that she establish her innocence, mental competence, and exemplary lifestyle? Margaret Sanger said it this way: “Woman was and is condemned to a system under which the lawful rapes exceed the unlawful ones a million to one” (Frank 701).

⁶ Men have used this vulnerability to their advantage countless times in a myriad of different ways. Susan Brownmiller, in the opening pages of her landmark book, Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape, observed, “Man’s discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.” This intimidation has served to perpetuate the belief that women are inferior beings, and as such, deserve to be treated in whatever manner the “superior beings” desire. Now, certainly this belief is not a universal one. Not all men view women as “fruit trees” to be owned—possessions to be dominated—by

violence, if necessary. However, the problem is severe enough to warrant a reevaluation of our cultural attitudes, if nothing else.

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My Argument

- 1) Rape is never consensual.
- 2) Women can be raped by acquaintances, even boyfriends and spouses.
- 3) Men never deserve to rape.
- 4) A view of sex as something men deserve to get—using force, if necessary—dehumanizes women.
- 5) Reducing all of humanity to mere biology altogether devalues the entire human race.
- 6) Just as men never have the right to rape, so also do women never deserve to be raped.
- 7) Women neither desire nor deserve to be attacked, violated, or humiliated; they do not, through conscious or unconscious actions, invite a man to invade them by force and steal their honor and dignity.
- 8) Primitive views of sexual assault encourage sexual predators to continue offending.
- 9) Women cannot and do not “relax and enjoy” being assaulted any more than murder victims could relax and enjoy the experience of being brutalized.
- 10) Women live every day with the reality that their femininity makes them prey to the culturally sanctioned behaviors of their male counterparts.
- 11) (Any act, view, or attitude that dehumanizes women is never justified.)
- 12) (Any act that women do not desire or deserve is dehumanizing.)

13) (Sexual violence devalues and dehumanizes women.) 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9
10

14) Sexual violence is never justified. 11, 12, 13

My Numerical Analysis

11, 12, 13

14

A One-Sentence Description of My Argument

The claim that sexual violence is never justified is the conclusion of a simple, sound, deductive argument.

An Evaluation of My Argument

I find my argument to be sound because the premises are true and acceptable. Arguments supporting differing conclusions reject the moral principles that our culture has codified by both local and national laws, policies, ordinances and social mores supported all major religions of our culture and by the principles of even secular moral codes like “secular humanism.”